

pepper.

He told us to go to the library
because they are all over our great country,
warm in winter, cool in summer,
librarians wearing pretty dresses —
spend time there, he said, learn something
interesting to you as an individual,
be like I am, he said, stand up for things
you believe in, be proud you are an
intellectual.

— Ray Clark Dickson

Shell Beach CA

HOW CAN I WHINE?

How can I whine when Floyd Patterson, knocked down seven
times in three rounds, says, "I'm the only guy to
get up seven times in a championship fight"?

How can I whine when everyday I see the same guy running
on the side of the road — in the cold, in the rain —
looking down at his watch?

How can I whine with Mother Teresa bathing the wounds
of lepers in Calcutta and shunning interviews?

How can I whine when I see mad wheelchair racers in
the Olympics trying to break records?

How can I whine when Bob Gibson, his leg broken by a
Roberto Clemente line drive, still manages to
throw two pitches to the next batter before
he collapses?

How can I whine when my grandfather is separated from
his family for seven years while he makes enough
money in America to send for them from across
the sea?

How can I whine when the first time my grandfather sees
my father is when my father is seven years old?

How can I whine when my uncle and father are told by
my grandfather when they are in the eighth grade:
"Whaddya gonna do — go to school all your life?"

How can I whine when the young Beatles play 8-10 hours
a day in sleazy Hamburg bars — taking turns sleeping
on stage while the others play?

How can I whine when Larry Bird scores thirty points in a playoff game, then checks into a hospital with his bad back to have himself put in traction until the next game two days later?

How can I whine when Truman Capote spends six years roaming around Kansas doing research for In Cold Blood, not knowing if he even has a book?

How can I whine when Jack Kerouac gets it all down in a matter of a few weeks (single-spaced) on hundred foot teletype rolls?

How can I whine when Bukowski hand prints his stories and poems (having hocked his typewriter), has them returned and rejected, then throws them out and immediately writes more?

How can I whine, how can I wish, how can I want when there is the job, always the job before me?

REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Oh, I know, the state of modern poetry is shit. What else? Kids are dumber. Never mind about miraculous electronic invention after invention, or new medicines, new treatments, and eradicated illnesses — look at the sinking SAT scores. What else? Oh yeah, violence. Society is much more violent today. Tell me, class, how many wars were there, and how many people died in Europe because of them, during the hundred-year period beginning in What else? Discontent — people are much more unhappy now. Believe me, they'd rather be slaving 14 hours a day out in the fields, maybe sacrificing an animal or a person, hoping it'd help the crops grow. What else? Divorce — people get divorces today and don't even care. Sure, just go talk to somebody with kids who got a divorce; they'll tell you what a lark it was. Anyway, it's better that two people live together and hate each other — like my grandmother and grandfather. I never heard them talk to each other and not curse each other out. What else? TV — people watch too much TV today. No one reads long, boring, sappy Victorian novels anymore — books with page-long sentences where it takes someone twenty paragraphs to walk across a room. What else? You know what I miss? Those wonderfully comic civil rights marches down South where the governor would unleash dogs, firehoses, and clubs on non-violent protestors. And all because of separate bathrooms. So who's the next great lamentor of contemporary culture who'll quote that damn poem by Yeats saying that "The center cannot hold"? Ah, but that was when poetry had structure, and meaning, and everyone read it and enjoyed it.